UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

The six principal organs of the United Nations are the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat. The Security Council is the UN organ on which all Member States have conferred "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. All UN Member States have agreed to accept and carry out the Council's decisions in accordance with the Charter.

When armed conflict erupts or when situations reach crisis level, the Council may take a range of measures to end hostilities, prevent the exacerbation of the conflict and ease tension. Originally a body of 11 members, the Security Council became a 15 member body on 1 January 1966, through an amendment to the Charter. Five of its members - China, France, the USSR, the United Kingdom and the United States - hold permanent seats on the Council. Ten others, which are elected by the General Assembly, serve two-year terms. In 1991, the non-permanent members are Austria, Belgium, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Ecuador, India, Romania, Yemen, Zaire and Zimbabwe.

Under the Charter, any UN Member State, the General Assembly or the Secretary-General can bring to the Council any matter that may endanger international peace and security. A State which is not a Member of the Organization may also bring before the Council a dispute to which it is a party, provided that it accepts in advance the Charter obligations for peaceful settlement. The Council is organized to function continuously and to meet at any time. For this reason, each Council member is represented at all times at UN Headquarters.

Each member of the Council has one vote. Procedural matters - such as the adoption of the agenda, invitations to Member States to participate in the Council's deliberations, or changes in the provisional rules of procedure - are decided by the affirmative vote of any nine members. In non-procedural matters, decisions are made by the affirmative vote of nine members of the Council including the concurring votes of the five permanent members. The permanent members may abstain or not participate at all in the voting, and still satisfy the stipulation of their concurrence in the affirmative vote.

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The Security Council has other duties apart from its main task of maintaining international peace and security. It makes recommendations to the General Assembly on the admission to the United Nations of new Member States. Under certain circumstances, the Council may recommend the suspension or expulsion of Member States. The Secretary-General of the United Nations is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. The Council also exercises all functions relating to strategic areas, including the approval of trusteeship agreements and of their alteration or amendment.

PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

Chapter VI of the Charter provides that parties to a dispute likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace "shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice." In this connection, the Council is empowered to call upon the parties to settle their disputes by such means and may, at any stage of such disputes, recommend appropriate procedures or methods of adjustment.

In discharge of this mandate, the Council has in many instances called for a cease-fire and the end of hostilities. At other times, it has recommended to disputants that they take steps in pursuit of a peaceful settlement. In many cases, the Council has also requested the Secretary-General to make available his good offices in an attempt to bring parties to negotiation. The Security Council may also investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute. It has employed this technique of fact-finding and enquiry throughout the history of the Organization. Currently, the Council continues to pursue efforts to find a peaceful solution to a number of conflicts including those in Cambodia, Central America, Cyprus, the Middle East, southern Africa and Western Sahara.

The Security Council may also establish peace-keeping operations to help control and resolve actual and potential conflicts or internal conflicts which have a clear international dimension. Of the 19 such operations mounted by the UN since its founding, eight operations are still in the field. In addition, on 29 April 1991 the Security Council decided to establish a new operation - the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) - which includes large civilian and military components. In 1988, in recognition of their invaluable service, UN peace-keeping forces were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

ACTIONS WITH RESPECT TO THREATS TO THE PEACE

Under Chapter VII of the Charter, conceived as a key element of the UN system of collective security, the Security Council "shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security". Such measures could include partial or complete interruption of economic relations and means of communication and the severance of diplomatic relations. Should those measures prove inadequate, the Council can take "such action by air, sea or land forces as may be necessary to restore international peace and security".

Prior to the imposition by the Security Council of sanctions against Iraq and occupied Kuwait in 1990, sanctions have been imposed by the Council in two other situations - on Southern Rhodesia between 1966 and 1977 (in response to its unilateral declaration of independence from the United Kingdom) and on South Africa in 1977 in the form of an arms embargo (in response to the Council's determination that in the context of its apartheid policies and attacks against neighbouring States, the acquisition by South Africa of arms and related *matériel* constituted a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security).

The Council has authorized the use of force in two other prior situations, although Chapter VII of the Charter was not explicitly invoked in the enabling resolutions. In 1950, as the Korean War began, the Security Council, with the Soviet Union absent, recommended that all Member States providing military forces and other assistance place them under a unified command under the United States of America. In the case of the Congo in 1961, the Security Council, under exceptional circumstances, authorized the United Nations peace-keeping operation known as ONUC (1960-1964) to use force as a last resort to prevent civil war in that country.

ACTION RELATING TO THE SITUATION BETWEEN IRAQ AND KUWAIT

On 2 August 1990, eleven hours after Iraq invaded Kuwait, the Security Council, in its resolution 660 (1990), condemned the illegal occupation of Kuwait and demanded that Iraq unconditionally withdraw its forces to the positions in which they had been located on 1 August 1990. For the next four months, the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, adopted a number of resolutions, including those providing for a comprehensive set of sanctions to compel Iraq to comply with resolution 660 (1990). On 29 November 1990, the Council adopted resolution 678 (1990), authorizing Member States cooperating with the Government of Kuwait to use after 15 January 1991 "all necessary means" to uphold and implement resolution 660 (1990) and all other Council resolutions stemming from the occupation of Kuwait, and to compel Iraq to withdraw from that country. After the 45-day pause to allow for further diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, a coalition of Member States, acting in accordance with the Council's authorization but not under the control of or direction by the United Nations, began offensive combat operations. Those operations were suspended on 27 February 1991 following the liberation of Kuwait.

On 3 April, the Security Council, in resolution 687 (1991), stipulated terms for a formal cease-fire, which were officially accepted by the Government of Iraq on 6 April. On 9 April, in resolution 689 (1991), the Council set up the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission, consisting of approximately 1,440 armed and unarmed military personnel, within the demilitarized zone on the boundary between Iraq and Kuwait.

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